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A Pivot of Their Own

China Reassesses the Rebalance to Asia Policy, and What that Means for the Trump Administration's Asia Policy

Christopher D. Yung

Abstract: The Rebalance to Asia was the Obama administration's foundational policy initiative meant to address the challenge of China's rise. The Chinese press and official PRC government policy statements characterized the policy as a thinly disguised containment policy. This article examines the Chinese academic assessment of the Rebalance to Asia policy. The author reviewed the writings of five Chinese intellectuals known for their close connections with different parts of the Chinese government. It identifies common themes among the assessments and points out key differences between them. The article concludes with an examination of how the new Trump administration may have altered these Chinese assessments and provides speculation on how changed Chinese perspectives might affect the future U.S.-China relationship.

Keywords: Rebalance, Pivot to Asia, Asia, China, Asia-Pacific, Trump, containment, foreign policy, Chinese academics, Chinese intellectuals, perspective

The Rebalance to Asia policy introduced by the Obama administration in 2011 has had more than half a decade to take hold and ferment. As the central guiding strategy for U.S. policy on Asia during the Obama

Christopher D. Yung, PhD, is the Donald Bren Chair of Non-Western Strategic Thought and the director of East Asian Studies at MCU, where he teaches China and East Asian strategic issues. Dr. Yung is the author, editor, and contributor to numerous books, articles, chapters, and monographs on Asian security and maritime issues. Previously, he served as senior research fellow and deputy director of the Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University. He received both his PhD and his MA from the Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University.

years, it will obviously be the center of scrutiny for an incoming Trump administration that has made no bones about fundamentally altering the policies of its predecessor. In fact, the Trump administration has already declared its predecessor's Rebalance to Asia policy to be over. It will thus be tempting for the new administration to throw the baby out with the bathwater. One of the important pieces of analysis that needs to be done before deciding on the fate of the policy components of the Rebalance is to evaluate to what extent it had a significant effect on China. Although American government officials insisted that the Rebalance was not just about China, certainly an important element of the policy was designed to have an effect on Chinese behavior, long-term Chinese policy, and the willingness of the Chinese to cooperate with the United States about regional and global security issues.

Previous scholarly works have examined the Chinese reactions to the Rebalance. The best Chinese examination of this subject, for instance, by Peking University Professor Wang Dong, engaged in a comprehensive examination of Chinese reactions to the Rebalance.¹ American scholarly works also have studied the policy objectives of the Rebalance, taken note of specific actions the U.S. government pursued in support of the Rebalance policy, and provided some initial evaluations on whether the Rebalance was having an effect on the region and on the Chinese based on public pronouncements and other measures of effectiveness.²

This article takes a decidedly different approach to evaluating how the Chinese may have reacted or thought about the Rebalance. Given that the Chinese government enlists the support of specific institutions to help it think through the implications of emerging international trends, the author of this article examined the writings of five Chinese scholars, all of whom are associated with institutions that have traditionally had a significant impact on official Chinese policy in the past. The writings selected for this research effort had to specifically be dedicated to the Rebalance policy, each had to involve an in-depth analysis of what the author believed the United States was trying to accomplish with this policy, each had to have an examination of the policy's effectiveness, and each had to provide guidance on what the Chinese government response or long-term strategy should be in response to the Rebalance. In examining what the Chinese academics wrote of the Rebalance, one of the objectives of this article was to explore the common assumptions shared by each of the scholars; and by contrast, it also examined where these scholars differed in their assessments and why. Based on this examination, the author speculated on how the arrival of the Trump administration, with different policy goals and assumptions about the Asia-Pacific than its predecessor, might have an impact on each of the conclusions of these various scholars.

The Scholars

Although China has no shortage of intellectuals who research and write on the United States, it was important to select scholars who were associated with institutions with a known connection to the Chinese government or the Chinese Communist Party. It was also important that this research take into account that different institutions have different institutional interests in advancing one line of argument against another. It was therefore important to select scholars and institutions that served as intellectual feeders to different parts of the Chinese system. As a consequence, the institution selection process centered around scholars who had done work for or were connected with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of State Security (the intelligence community), the State Council, and the Central Military Commission (the military). The selected scholars are: Wang Jisi, dean of the School of International Studies, Peking University; Wang Zaibang, former vice president of the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR); Zhu Feng, current director of the Maritime Studies Institute of Nanjing University and former professor of the School of International Studies, Peking University; Major General Chen Zhou, senior director of National Defense Policy Research Center, Academy of Military Science (AMS), and author of the Chinese defense white papers; and Qi Dapeng, deputy director and master supervisor at the Institute for Strategic Studies, People's Liberation Army (PLA) National Defense University.

Some Caveats

Before getting into the heart of the research and the author's findings, it is necessary to be explicit about what an analysis of this type does not provide the reader. First, all of the writings upon which the research for this article is based are in the public domain. These essays, then, were obtained either through the U.S. government's Open Source Center, were published in books or journals the author obtained during periodic visits to China, or were found online. This means that, while the content of the writings can be considered *quasi-authoritative*, it cannot be taken as representing official policy or what the Chinese have decided behind closed doors.³ The best that an analysis of this kind can offer is the likelihood that it represents Chinese perspectives being discussed at academic and official ministry levels. Second, although the scholars listed in this work are or have been associated with universities and research think tanks that have had powerful connections and influenced policy in the past, it cannot be said with any certainty that the views expressed in their essays truly reflect the views of their institutions. Third, an article that purports to take a sample of Chinese academic writings that represent schools of thought and divisions of academic opinion in China on the Rebalance's implications

for China is bound to reflect the bias (unintentional or not) of the author and analyst doing the selecting. In other words, the process by which this researcher selected Chinese scholars ultimately is marked by selection bias. It is certainly possible, and even likely, that a Chinese professor from one of China's finest academic institutions or another American China specialist might choose a different list of scholars from which to compare and contrast views.

The Essays

The essays examined in this article were published in a variety of publications. One of the essays was published by Peking University Press in the book, *New Type of Great Power Relations: Opportunities and Challenges*.⁴ The content of the essay examined in this volume, "Will China and U.S. Go Their Separate Ways or Will They Head in The Same Direction?" by Wang Jisi, was primarily theoretical and reflected an academic's treatment of the subject. Another essay, "U.S. Rebalancing Strategy Towards the Asia-Pacific and the Political Prospects of East Asia" by Qi Dapeng, was published by the Military Science Publishing House of the PLA National Defense University and is largely a policy analysis of the strategic environment.⁵ The essay by Wang Zaibang, "A Review and Reflection on the Epoch-Making Transformation of China-US Relations," was published in the policy journal *Contemporary International Relations*, by the CICIR.⁶ Although a policy journal, *Contemporary International Relations* is considered a publication platform for regional, theoretical, and policy analysis scholars being trained by CICIR, which in turn serves as a feeder of analysts to China's Ministry of State Security (China's version of a combined FBI and CIA). It is therefore not surprising that this essay had more of a theoretical approach to studying this problem than a policy maker's approach.

Another academic journal, *China International Strategy Review 2012*, published by the Foreign Language Press, ran Zhu Feng's "The Obama Administration's 'Rebalancing' Toward Asia and Sino-U.S. Relations."⁷ Zhu's essay is less theoretical and more policy prescriptive. Finally, the Academy of Military Science (AMS) report, *Strategic Review 2012*, has an entire section devoted to the Rebalance.⁸ Entitled "The Strategic Adjustment of the United States," it is credited to the faculty and specialists of AMS; nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the editor overseeing the report is Chen Zhou, the author of the annual China defense white paper. As should be expected, this assessment is largely a military analysis of the Rebalance and interpretations of U.S. motives and the sustainability of the Rebalance. It should not be surprising that it was heavily influenced by a military intelligence and professional military education point of view.

What the Authors Had in Common

In examining similarities among the authors' essays, we can establish some common assumptions and frameworks from the Chinese perspective. The first of these commonalities is the idea that the long-term objective of the United States is to remain the global and regional hegemon and will do everything in its power to keep it that way. Zhu Feng writes that "the 'rebalancing' strategy is one that seeks a 'century's leadership' for the United States, comprehensively strengthening its dominant role in the Asia-Pacific region. The United States will intensify its input into this region's politics, economy and diplomacy, and play a leadership role for the 21st century while taking the responsibility for regional security and stability."⁹ Chen Zhou and his colleagues at AMS write that "the U.S. is speeding up the implementation of its 'rebalancing' strategy in the Asia-Pacific, counter-balancing the growth of Asian-Pacific emerging powers, 'controlling' the effect of China's development, grabbing and sharing the opportunities and dynamics of the regional economic development, maintaining its dominating position in the region so as to strengthen its global hegemony."¹⁰

Even Wang Jisi, the most liberal minded of the authors discussed here, admits that the United States sees China as a challenge to its dominance of the international system. He writes,

The West sees the rise of China as a challenge to their values and regime model. Therefore, the West has intensified their strategies to westernize and divide China, and to use the internet and other channels to infiltrate China. China must remain vigilant at all times about the ideology battle at home and abroad. . . . The aggressive posture of the West, as well as the West's insistence on continually criticizing China's political system, internal economic policies, social policies, culture, and traditions, have tarnished China's reputation, and have instilled a "strong West versus weak-self" mentality within China.¹¹

A second commonality is that each essay asserted that the following served as instruments of the Rebalance: (1) adjustments to military force posture or deployment patterns in the Asia-Pacific; (2) enhanced economic statecraft; (3) reinvigorated alliances and partnerships in the region; (4) increased diplomatic activities, especially by America's highest political leadership; and (5) the heightened use of legal norms and instruments to advance American interests in the region. Wang Jisi writes that

in order to strengthen its economic competence, explore overseas markets, and retain the right to make rules, the Obama administration has eagerly endorsed the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations, which mainly cover the liberation of capital, state-owned enterprises, labor criteria, protection of intellectual property rights, and other issues. When China expressed its tentative desire to take part in the TPP, U.S. officials stated that China would only be welcome when negotiation talks with Japan, Australia, and some ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] countries are concluded. In terms of military and security, the U.S. and its allies Japan and South Korea, have established a Ballistic Missile Defense System (BMDS). In addition, a Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC) is also under development. These moves are considered responses to China's increased military power. The competitive stances of the two can also be seen on the rise within the Asia-Pacific diplomatic area.¹²

Zhu Feng writes that “despite pending defense budget cuts, the U.S. will not decrease its military presence in the region. Conversely, it will further strengthen the U.S. military's strategic influence through pivoting toward Asia, setting a basic political tone for the promotion of a new military strategy. In its ‘Priorities for 21st Century Defense,’ released on January 5, 2012, the Obama administration clearly identified the U.S. military's strategic ‘rebalancing’ in the Asia-Pacific region as a core link for future adjustments in military power, its optimization of global strategic deployments, and the affirmation of new major military tasks in response to rising threats.” Zhu adds, “The ‘rebalancing’ is a rules-based strategy under which the United States urges Asia-Pacific nations to ‘abide by’ as well as create rules for the region's security hotspots. The core of this strategy is that the U.S. wants to use international norms and rules to regulate and guide China. In addressing China-related issues the United States will collaborate with other countries in the region to handle China through a rule-making and rule-application framework as opposed to a simple bilateral framework.”¹³

Finally, Qi Dapeng notes that a cornerstone of the political dimension of the U.S. rebalancing strategy is that “the United States attaches great importance to strengthening relationships with existing alliances.”¹⁴ It will go to great lengths to work out cooperative security programs with its current allies, as well as develop a new network of political partnerships with countries in the region who have not traditionally been allied with the United States, such as Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia.¹⁵ Zhu Feng observes in his essay that “the Asian Pivot

Strategy is a deeper, wider U.S. presence and participation in the diplomacy and the politics of the Asia-Pacific. Particularly, the United States will promote long-term strategic interests through greater involvement in this region's multilateral mechanisms, relying on cooperation with allies and partners to settle regional issues and give expression to U.S. long-term interests."¹⁶ Chen Zhou and his colleagues at AMS echo the theme of strengthening the alliance relationships when they write "[through the Rebalance] the U.S. traditional alliances are strengthened. Facing the dramatic changes of the regional force landscape and the relative decline of the U.S. power, the U.S. pays more attention to enhancing the internal cohesion of alliances, strengthening the power of the allies and expanding the duties and responsibilities of the alliances."¹⁷

A third commonality is that each author asserted that the United States suffered either a setback, a miscalculation, or a shortcoming of some kind necessitating a course correction in U.S. policy. Chen Zhou and his AMS colleagues note that the Rebalance is really meant to correct a misallocation of resources, and overemphasizing some parts of the globe at the expense of others. They write, "The core points (of the Rebalance) . . . is to . . . change the past imbalanced state of focusing too many strategic resources on the Greater Middle East and laying too much emphasis on dealing with non-conventional threats."¹⁸ Wang Jisi, in his essay, observes that "the strategic adjustment and correction of the Obama administration is, in essence an attempt to correct the country's deviation from its development path."¹⁹ According to Wang,

Since Obama took office, especially since his second term, the "internalization" trend has become very much apparent. Fiscal balance, economic rebound, enlarging employment, political polarization, medical reform, gun control, the anti-drug campaign, and migration policy, are all on top of the Obama administration's agenda. Therefore the U.S. has to take a defensive stance on foreign relations, in order to heal the wounds from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as those from the financial crisis. This has resulted in the U.S. being more cautious to think twice before making any moves on the international stage, especially with regards to international military intervention.²⁰

Zhu Feng notes that "owing to a consistently high financial deficit, the U.S. military will inevitably enter an era of belt tightening, and reductions in military spending. The pivoting toward Asia represents . . . the Obama administration's measures to tighten military budgets."²¹

Qi Dapeng observes in his essay that "ever since the outbreak of the finan-

cial crisis in 2008, U.S. economic recovery could hardly pick up strength, the unemployment problem has aggravated, and U.S. national debt has repeatedly exceeded the upper limit prescribed by Congress.” He continues,

In 2011, U.S. national debt outnumbered its total GDP; in 2012, its debt reached the record high of \$16 trillion. The depressed domestic economy has directly resulted in the declining international reputation of the dollar. . . . The population below the poverty line has exceeded 50 million, a new height for over half a century; while the richest 10% of the population own 80% of the total wealth in the United States. Therefore, it is obvious that the United States is facing severe domestic political, economic and social difficulties. . . . As the new U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry indicates, in the face of the financial crisis, the United States “can’t be strong in the world unless we’re strong at home.”²²

A fourth commonality is the idea that the specific tipping point leading to the Rebalance was the American realization that it had to do something about China’s rise. Therefore, despite years of American insistence to the contrary, the selected Chinese authors all believed that the Rebalance is largely an effort to contain, suppress, or manage China’s rise. The United States perceived China as a threat either (1) to its global stature, (2) to its ability to dominate the Asia-Pacific Region for the purposes of shoring up its economy, (3) to its control over the international system, or (4) to its military preeminence. Qi Dapeng notes that “the rapid rise of China’s power and influence and its geopolitical advantage of locating in the central of Asia, will probably grant it enormous power to lead the Asia-Pacific—the world’s economic center. This undoubtedly portends the end of U.S. global hegemony. Therefore, in the face of China’s rapid rise, the United States has regarded China as a direct challenge to its hegemony in the Asia-Pacific and even in the world at large, and has thus been gripped by great anxiety. This forces the United States to count China as its main target to balance and conduct global strategic adjustment.”²³

Wang Zaibang has argued in his essay that American decline has been gradual but unmistakable and that U.S. policy makers simply do not want to accept reality that America’s position is being overtaken by China’s. He writes, “Even though an epoch-making transformation of China-U.S. relations is at hand, Americans particularly elites and politicians, cannot accept the harsh reality of U.S. decline. . . . It needs time for the U.S. to truly recognize both the landslide of change and the sincerity of China’s peaceful development policy.”²⁴ He continues that “this . . . transformation was ignited by the financial crisis and

marked iconically by the Beijing Olympic Games. Relations today have entered the most complex, subtle stage of transformation. . . . The U.S. is practicing exclusion, containment, and squeeze on China.”²⁵

Finally, it is noteworthy that none of the authors in these essays advocated a hard line as a response to the Rebalance. Each of the authors advocated a *New Type of Major Power Relationship* as the overarching framework to properly respond to the U.S. policy, and none advocated a harder, more assertive, and military-oriented policy as a response. Some of the authors differed in emphasis on the specific actions that needed to be taken underneath an umbrella of the New Type of Major Power Relationship, and these will be discussed at length as we explore the differences among the essays. Each argued, however, that the correct Chinese response was the New Type of Major Power Relationship, which has been Beijing’s carefully crafted effort—five years in the making—to properly manage the power transition between the United States and China.

How Some Authors Differed

As will be seen from this research, the differences between the various authors reveal departures in assessments of what underlying motives caused the United States to embark on the Rebalance policy, how successful the Rebalance policy was perceived to be by the various scholars, what role or responsibility China should bear in bringing about the Rebalance to Asia policy, and what specifically China should do about the Rebalance policy under the umbrella of a New Type of Major Power Relationship.

Underlying Motivations for the United States to Launch the Rebalance

The Chinese theses explaining what ultimately motivated the Obama administration to embark on the Rebalance appear to fall into three camps: the domestic political-economy camp, the balancing resources for hegemony camp, and the operational adjustment camp. Wang Jisi, for example, observes that, as Richard Haas has written, “foreign policy begins at home”; and in his essay, he notes that “a country’s [economic] development path determines how it defines its national interests, as well as the general direction of its foreign policy.”²⁶ For the United States, Wang writes, “In the era of globalization, the stability of global trade, investment and finance is indispensable to the prosperity of the U.S. economy. Safeguarding the financial order under the hegemony of the U.S. dollar, fair trade, the protection of intellectual property rights and other norms of capitalist market economy, and ensuring the acquisition of overseas resources, are the core objectives of the economic portion of the U.S. post-Cold War grand strategy.”²⁷ Wang continues that “the U.S. cannot safeguard its national security, advance its overseas interests, enhance international competency, and

augment its global influence unless it takes measures to consolidate its infrastructure, improve educational levels, amend its outdated immigration policy and liquidize its debts.”²⁸ The underlying logic behind the Rebalance strategy, according to Wang Jisi, is that it is meant to shore up the American leadership role in the international system. That role ensures that the material and economic benefits of the system continue to accrue to the United States, enabling it to address domestic economic challenges. This is especially the case since the Asia-Pacific is widely recognized as the future engine of global economic growth. To summarize, Wang writes, “For the U.S., China does not pose any threat to its own state system, political system, polity, national unification, or territorial integrity. The main concern for the U.S. is that China, with its growing power and influence in the world, poses a challenge to the U.S.’ status in the world and the international order that it advocates.”²⁹

A competing school of thought is the balancing resources for hegemony camp. Qi Dapeng, in his essay, writes that

the Obama Administration’s rebalancing strategy towards the Asia Pacific epitomizes that the United States has a realistic understanding of its own limited strength after tasting the bitter fruit of over-expansion brought on by a decade of war on terror. As a result, the U.S. has to strike a balance in the following four respects: it has to balance recovering the domestic foundation of hegemony, namely its domestic economy against maintaining world hegemony; it has to balance global strategic contraction against a buildup of strength in the Asia-Pacific; it has to make use of Asian countries to balance a rising China; [and] it has to strike a balance between competition and cooperation with China.³⁰

It should not be surprising that a third camp, led by the military intelligence community, argues that the underlying motives of the Obama administration’s Rebalance are less political-economical and hegemonic-resource based but largely military-strategic in nature. Chen Zhou and his colleagues at AMS write that

the core points [of the Rebalancing Strategy] include accelerating the shift of the U.S. strategic focus to the east, adjusting its strategic layout focusing on the Western Pacific, reinforcing the Navy and Air combat forces in the Western Pacific, and optimizing the deployment structure, so as to enhance their ability to respond to “anti-access/area denial” (A2/AD) chal-

allenges, as well as the ability to win information-based high-end conventional war. The essence is to shorten the battle line, concentrate on key points, change the past imbalanced state of focusing too many strategic resources on the Greater Middle East and laying too much emphasis on dealing with non-conventional threats, and in the context of tightening defense budgets, continue to maintain military superiority of the United States.³¹

How Successful Was the Rebalance?

Since the authors made different arguments about the motivations for the Rebalance policy, it only makes sense that they would differ on how to measure success of the policy. Chen Zhou and his colleagues note that the United States has successfully revitalized the U.S.-Japan and the U.S.-Republic of Korea (ROK) alliance relationships; the United States has successfully deepened its partner relationships with the countries in the region (e.g., Vietnam, India, and Singapore); and the United States has successfully arranged for a number of joint bilateral and multilateral exercises with the countries of the region.³² Zhu Feng essentially sides with this interpretation of American success when he writes, “For the first time in the 20 years since the Cold War ended, the United States has markedly expanded its military presence in the Asia-Pacific region, promoting new military expansion at any cost, and deepening and intensifying reactions to regional security situations brought about by its perception of China’s rise.”³³

Wang Zaibang, arguing that a tectonic shift in the international system has already occurred, and that the Rebalance has been a last-ditch effort for the United States to stave off the inevitable, essentially argues that the policy has been a grand failure. He writes,

China does not have to keep awake nights when facing outside challenges, threats or pressures [i.e., the Rebalance]. No country or country groups can publicly threat[en] China, let alone contain it if China does not bully the weak and make enemies around its borders. China yet needs advanced diplomatic concentration and wisdom but now is gaining strategic confidence. Although the U.S. does not officially accept it, China should have confidence in the new type of relationship that is epoch-making for both. China will continue to win more countries’ support, and China and the U.S. come to better understand each other at the strategic level.³⁴

Qi Dapeng notes that the Rebalance policy has largely been counterproductive. If the intent of the policy was to balance the resource requirements for hegemony, then the policy has failed, and will continue to fail in the long run. He writes, “The core political task of the U.S. for a certain period in the future is to consolidate the domestic foundation of U.S. hegemony, namely promoting domestic reforms and recovering domestic economy, all of which depends on China’s rapidly expanding domestic economy, all of which depends on China’s rapidly expanding domestic market. This fact determines that the United States cannot be in outright confrontation with China.”³⁵ Practically speaking, this has not been the case. He notes that “over the past few years, the ‘rebalancing strategy towards the Asia Pacific’ has produced a series of negative effects.” Qi quotes American China expert, Kenneth G. Lieberthal, in noting that “the Obama Administration’s ‘Rebalancing Strategy Towards the Asia Pacific’ enhances rather than reduces negative security outcomes.”³⁶ Additionally, Qi notes, “For other East Asian countries, they do not want to see the confrontation occur between China and the U.S. where they would be forced to choose a side. . . . If the United States does not change its course of action, more countries will become vigilant against the United States.”³⁷

How Self-Aware Are the Chinese?

Most of the essays discussed in this article were written as if China’s peaceful rise had been accepted by most of the countries of the region, and that it was the United States, with its desire to cling to hegemony and dominance in the region, that has caused the possibility of conflict there.

Wang Zaibang writes, “The U.S., not directly a concerned party in the South China Sea disputes, set aside its public policy of non-interference in sovereignty disagreements and seized upon navigation freedom as the excuse to make trouble out of nothing and exert influence. Future Sino-U.S. games will develop in a more balanced direction given China’s increasing power.”³⁸ In his essay, Qi Dapeng writes,

By initiating the “rebalancing strategy towards the Asia-Pacific,” the Obama administration has introduced security competition into East Asia. . . . [The] U.S. . . . has brought about important changes in the nature of international relations in the region, i.e., shifting from “emphasizing economy, making light of strategy” to “emphasizing strategy, making light of economy.” And this change also forces China to shift its focus from the original economic level to the military and strategic level. At present, the theme of development in East

Asia has been watered down; security competition has risen to the surface.³⁹

Surprisingly, two essays displayed a remarkable sense of awareness that China's rise actually could be perceived as a threat by some of the countries in the region and by the United States. Wang Jisi writes, "China's national defense expenditure is increasing rapidly. And the growth of Chinese military power has attracted a large amount of attention, while the U.S. has been forced to cut down its own national defense budget."⁴⁰

Zhu Feng similarly writes that the U.S. policy shift was inevitable given the perceived threats posed by a rapid rise in China. He writes,

With China's rise, North Korean nuclear impasse and new orientations in the Asia-Pacific security, it is inevitable for the United States to update and expand its Asia-Pacific security strategy. . . . Several factors account for this policy shift. First, the U.S. assessment of China's threat has changed from traditional bilateral, ideological and structural disputes concerning Taiwan and Tibet, to greater challenges arising from China's new capabilities and intentions. Second, as China rises, traditional U.S. allies and defense partners in the Asia-Pacific have begun to doubt American security commitments and strategic capabilities in the region. The Obama Administration needs to reaffirm its strategic advantages and its resolve in the Asia-Pacific, and regain strategic dominance within the region.⁴¹

Differing Chinese Foreign Policy Responses to the Rebalance

Perhaps owing to the fact that by 2012 the Chinese Communist Party had already declared that the official response to the challenge of U.S.-China relations was going to be the umbrella concept of a New Type of Major Power Relationship, all of the essays discussed here noted that the proper Chinese response to the Rebalance had to be the New Type of Major Power Relationship. However, because these essays offered different underlying causes prompting the United States to embark on the Rebalance to Asia strategy, these authors offered different foreign policy remedies. Wang Jisi, for example, writes that "the key to building a new type of China-U.S. relations is to comprehend the different thoughts and expectations for the future, to pinpoint where their interests will cross, and to avoid clashes. Only when the U.S. respects and does not challenge China's fundamental political system or its domestic order subjectively, can China come to respect and accept U.S. leadership in the world and the international order it [the U.S.] presides over."⁴² He continues, "For various rea-

sons, including a misunderstanding of China's key concerns, the U.S. has never explicitly expressed its respect for the Chinese political system, domestic order or development path. Yet, the U.S. continues to ask China for cooperation on major international issues."⁴³ The key to the proper Chinese response should be to negotiate for greater respect and to strongly advocate American respect for and noninterference in China's domestic political system. For Wang, the central element of China's response to the Rebalance is a political and diplomatic response centered on a negotiation or a persistent strategic interaction with the United States.

Not surprisingly for the Chinese Military-Intelligence Community, the Chinese response to the Rebalance centers around coming to negotiated agreements with the United States following the U.S. realization that it must form a balance of power with China in the region. Chen Zhou and his AMS colleagues write, "Although the U.S. strategic focus has shifted to the east, which added a lot of variables to the Sino-U.S. relations, the possibility of all-out confrontation between the two countries is still thin. It is still possible to shake off historical fate and build a new type of relationship between [the] major power[s]."⁴⁴ Chen argues that the New Type of Major Power Relationship is realized when the United States concludes that "first the United States is unable to pull up an international union to contain China. . . . Second, the overall stability of the Sino-U.S. relations is the highest common divisor of the countries in the region. China, the United States and China's neighbors are expected to form a plurality of triangular relationships, which hold each other up. . . . A stable relationship with China is seen [by the U.S.] as a necessary condition to avoid the Asian-Pacific situation going out of control, and it is also a key factor in dealing with important international topics and responding to global challenges."⁴⁵ Additionally, Chen and his AMS colleagues note that "from the perspective of maintaining the balance between big powers, many of China's neighboring countries would like to see the United States continue to stay in Asia, but do not want the United States [to] take policies too adventurous which may upset China and will not join any alliance to contain China." Finally, "China's strategic capability of curbing crises and wars has been improving, which can help prevent the Sino-U.S. resolutions from deviating from the normal track. . . . [T]he modernization of China's armed forces has also been steadily progressing at their own pace. The ability to maintain peace and deter wars has been steadily progressing at their own pace. The ability to maintain peace and deter wars has achieved great improvements so that the Chinese military is increasingly a staunch force to maintain the regional stability."⁴⁶ For Chen, then, the key to implementing a New Type of Major Power Relationship lies in continuing the effective modernization of the Chinese military to address China's emerging national security concerns and to form a stable balance of power

with the United States; subsequently, once in a position of strength, China and the United States can come to agreements on a wide range of security and political issues. America's allies and partners in the region, not wanting to take sides in a Sino-U.S. competition, will encourage dialogue and negotiated settlements between the powers.

For thinkers like Qi Dapeng, who emphasize the natural evolution of the system away from American dominance and unipolarity toward one of multipolarity, the key to managing the Sino-U.S. relationship is to encourage the continued evolution of the system through carefully prodded foreign policy actions. He writes, "The regional power structure in East Asia is being characterized by checks and balances. America's 'rebalancing strategy towards the Asia Pacific' undoubtedly singles out China as its prime target to balance. . . . In the meantime, most East Asian countries actually have their own balance strategies. They would like to seek a proper balance of power between China and the United States in order to expand their own national interests. ASEAN countries, for example, are influenced by the Western-dominated international opinion and harbor doubts about China's rise."⁴⁷ At the same time, Qi believes the natural evolution of the international system appears to be toward a multipolar balance of power. He writes,

The check and balance power structure in East Asia is also reflected in various mechanisms that are mutually constraining. Given its network of alliances in East Asia, the U.S. possesses a strategic advantage on security issues over China, which adopts a policy of non-alignment. However, the ASEAN Plus Three and ASEAN Plus One mechanisms in which China participates help the country possess a strategic advantage on economy issues over the U.S. In order to dominate the Asia-Pacific economic integration, the U.S. has been promoting the construction of TPP [Trans-Pacific Partnership]; while China naturally joins the RCEP [Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership] mechanism.⁴⁸

Qi notes that there may be a natural evolution toward multipolarity—a natural evolution that China should consider focusing its foreign policy efforts on. "This simply means that more regional mechanisms will arise, thereby weaving various forces in East Asia into a network founded upon a variety of mechanisms. As a result multipolar balance may become the basic political form in East Asia, or even the Asia-Pacific region."⁴⁹ Practically speaking, Qi's foreign policy approach suggests initiatives that encourage fielding competing institutions to the U.S. structures of power (e.g., the International Monetary

Fund and the World Bank). This approach has been labeled by other Chinese analysts as indirect or “soft power balancing” activities, which include eroding American institutional power with competing Chinese institutional power, such as by the creation of alternative institutions to compete with U.S.-dominated institutions.⁵⁰

Up to this point, this article has pinpointed the academic response to the Rebalance to Asia policy. In particular, it has examined themes that the Chinese academy has identified as shaping the effective foreign policy response to the challenges posed by the Rebalance policy. Is there any evidence that the official Chinese foreign policy response has reflected these academic views? The short answer is yes. To date, Chinese foreign policy has elements of all of the themes put forward by the Chinese academics discussed in this article. First, the Chinese use of diplomacy and direct negotiations with the United States to generate mutual understanding and respect between the two major powers has been well documented. This includes the entire New Type of Major Power Relations diplomatic effort, the informal discussions over a possible G-2 formulation between the United States and China, Chinese support for high-level strategic dialogues including the Strategic and Economic Dialogues, and Chinese support for continued military-to-military relations.⁵¹

Second, the Chinese military academic suggestion that ongoing military modernization would continually place China in a position to negotiate or advance its interests gradually with the United States is illustrated by PLA activities for the past half decade. Moreover, there is no debate among the analytical community within the United States that Chinese military modernization has continued apace. Within the past decade, in fact, we have witnessed: (1) the announcement of the acquisition of an aircraft carrier; (2) the continued modernization of China’s submarine and surface combatant fleets; (3) the development of fourth generation aircraft; (4) the continued improvement of China’s nuclear forces including recent announcements of creating multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles out of China’s Dongfeng-5 intercontinental ballistic missiles; (5) the Chinese naval capability to operate out of area, in particular to escort ships through the Gulf of Aden; (6) the acquisition of modern amphibious ships (Type 071 or landing platform docks [LPDs]); and (7) the demonstrated ability to attack satellites or space assets. All of these military modernization efforts have taken place while the Chinese military has been in direct negotiations and discussions with its American counterparts on a wide range of security issues.⁵²

Third, the Chinese academic suggestion that China can compete successfully with the United States indirectly through soft power balancing or the creation of competing institutional organizations, which can serve to further Chinese economic and political interests both within the region and outside

of it, has been demonstrated recently by: (1) the creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank; (2) the proposal for RCEP as a direct competitor to the TPP; (3) the One Belt, One Road initiative as a Chinese Marshall Plan; and (4) China's creation of a Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a direct competitor to NATO.⁵³

That all of these elements of Chinese foreign policy have been manifest over the past half decade suggests that Chinese foreign policy makers and strategists have not embraced one foreign policy approach over another, but have either synthesized them into a combined approach or are hedging their policy initiatives to broadly mitigate or offset the effects of the Rebalance to Asia policy.

How Does Trump's Asia Policy Change the Conversation?

At present, it is too early in the Trump administration's term to discern fully the oncoming changes to the Obama administration's Rebalance policy; however, even at this early stage, there have been some noticeable changes that might serve as a clue to what is to come. For instance, the immediate rejection of the TPP by the then-newly elected president was an early sign of policy trajectory.⁵⁴ A second sign was the then-president elect's public comments questioning the utility of the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-ROK alliances, particularly in the sufficiency of those countries' material contributions to the alliances.⁵⁵ This questioning of the state of the alliances may have been counteracted by the subsequent visit to the Asia-Pacific by Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis, who, in meeting with Japanese and Korean allies, insisted that the alliances were strong and the United States was still fully committed to them.⁵⁶ A third sign has been the creation of a White House National Trade Council, whose apparent purpose is to ensure that American interests come first in trade and international economic transactions.⁵⁷ A fourth sign has been the president's commentary on his support for the military, particularly an interest in increasing the military's budget and an intention to increase the Navy's force structure.⁵⁸ A fifth sign was a firm signal sent from both the incoming secretary of state and the Trump administration's press secretary, Sean M. Spicer, that the United States was likely to be more forceful in managing maritime territorial disputes with China—the former going so far as to state at his confirmation hearing that the United States might be willing to blockade or impede Chinese naval supplies to its garrisons in the South China Sea.⁵⁹ Finally, the president's initial communications with the People's Republic of China appeared to call into question the foundations upon which the two countries have interacted bilaterally for four decades (e.g., taking a direct phone call from Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen and then publicly questioning the validity of the One China policy).⁶⁰ The latter sign may have been mitigated by subsequent comments from the president, who publicly

stated that he supported a continuation of the One China policy and downplayed the significance of his phone call with President Tsai.⁶¹

Some of the authors discussed in this article have explicitly written about what some of these developments might mean for U.S.-China relations. Da Wei, head of Institute of American Studies, CICIR, interviewed in *The Diplomat*, noted that “the year 2017 will be a testing time for the China-U.S. relations, and Trump’s presidency will likely create a great number of challenges. China should be mentally prepared for such difficulties and work out comprehensive contingency plans. When the circumstances call for it, China needs to have the courage to react and defend its interests and should not eschew paying the necessary price.” Wang Jisi, in the same interview, said, “Deng Xiaoping once said that China and the U.S. eventually will have to get along. President Xi Jinping has also reiterated on several occasions that common interests between China and the U.S. outweigh their differences. Rather than tactful diplomatic words, these are strategic assessments based on objective circumstances.”⁶²

By contrast, Zhu Feng has taken note of the increasing tension between the two major powers and the politicization of the most sensitive of U.S.-China issues—the South China Sea. His views are cited in *Time*: “Zhu Feng, professor of international relations at Nanjing University, says the South China Sea will now remain an ‘essential component’ of Washington’s Asia-Pacific Security Strategy. ‘The entire U.S.-China relationship is a minefield,’ he tells *Time*. ‘There’s not one place to stick your foot.’”⁶³

Shen Dingli, associate dean at Fudan University, has observed that some of the actions of the Trump administration have largely reflected a complete reversal of past U.S. political positions and appear to be at odds with previous American foreign policy positions that have, in the past, served U.S. interests. “Trump’s initial play of the Taiwan card,” he writes, “has branded his administration with unpredictability. Such uncertainty undermines the US reputation to conduct international relations, and is detrimental to its own fundamental interests. As the Chinese side has made clear that its core interests are non-negotiable, Washington has to be prepared for a major collision with Beijing on this issue, destabilizing the entire Pacific and the world.”⁶⁴

Wang Dong, an associate professor of international studies at Peking University, notes that “this is a wake up call for Beijing—we should buckle up for a pretty rocky six months or year in the China-U.S. relationship. There was a sort of delusion based on overly optimistic ideas about Trump. That should stop.”⁶⁵

Although many of the scholars covered in this article have not had time to digest fully the implications of a new Trump administration, it is possible to identify some developing policy themes coming out of the new American administration and speculate on the effect these policy themes will have on their views of the United States and subsequently on China’s American policies.

First, the authors put forward the thesis that the United States, under Obama, used four very explicit tools to advance American interests in the region. These tools, including diplomatic, legal, economic, and military instruments, do not appear to all be in play under the Trump administration. The Chinese have already taken advantage of this lapse in the use of all of America's instruments of power. Immediately after the TPP had collapsed as a U.S. initiative, President Xi Jinping called for the continuation of a free trade regime under RCEP, and China's president subsequently announced at the World Economic Forum that China is willing to step in as the new leader of the global international economic order.

Second, if there has been a debate among these Chinese academics as to what the underlying rationale for the Rebalance was under Obama, the underlying rationale for U.S. engagement strategy in the Asia-Pacific for the Trump administration appears to be explicit: balancing resources domestically and externally for the specific purpose of continuing American hegemony. This is illustrated by the new administration's "America First" mantra; its fixation on trade agreements that have cost American jobs; its fondness for protectionist trade policies; and an eagerness to pressure allies to pay a greater share of alliance upkeep. Although the Chinese have not yet explicitly exploited this development, the apparent exposure of the naked rationale that the United States appears to really be in it only to shore up its domestic economy and its global dominance at the expense of the international economic order and the well-being of other countries in the system will ultimately play into China's long-term efforts to separate the United States from its allies and partners in the region.

Third, although the Rebalance to Asia is now expected to display less of the economic, diplomatic, and legal instruments of power, there is no question that it is the intent of the Trump administration to be able to increase and use more of the military instrument of power in the region. Whereas under Obama, the Rebalance was an effort to build up and revitalize the other elements of national power, sometimes at the expense of the military instrument, under Trump the military instrument will be paramount and central to exerting American influence in the region. This, no doubt, will lend credibility and weight to those Chinese scholars and policy advisors, largely from the military-intelligence camp, who counsel relentless development of Chinese military capabilities, the continued militarization of Chinese positions in the South China Sea, and less cooperation on a range of global security issues in the absence of explicit American concessions.

Fourth, although this administration has explicitly called into question the utility of investing time, resources, and political capital in the liberal economic trading order, the Chinese authors recognize that the intent of the Trump administration does not differ markedly from the Obama administration's policy

objectives for the region. That is, although differing in tactics and strategy, the Trump administration still intends to shore up domestic economic difficulties through its interactions in the Asia-Pacific and its interactions with China in particular. Although the Obama administration did not make trade deficits and trade disputes in general, currency manipulation, corporate espionage, and bilateral investment agreements the centerpieces of American China policy, these were still concerns. The Chinese recognize that these issues now get moved to the forefront of the priorities of the new administration. That means, as Wang Dong noted previously, that the Chinese are gearing up for a fight on many of these fronts and that the U.S.-China relationship will be in for a rocky ride.

Conclusion

When it was announced, the Rebalance to Asia policy convinced many Chinese—in government, in academia, and the average man on the street—that the policy was largely a containment strategy of some kind in disguise. As the Chinese academy studied it, Chinese intellectuals were not disabused of this initial notion; however, they came to develop what they thought was a deeper understanding of what motivated the United States to initiate the policy. These motivations included efforts on the United States' part to shore up its domestic economic problems with the spoils of dominating the Asia-Pacific and the international system; balancing U.S. domestic economic and social ills with the requirements of being a hegemonic power; or operationally adjusting America's strategic focus to correct a misallocation of resources to the Middle East or an overemphasis on nontraditional threats.

The Chinese academy correctly identified the tools of the Rebalance to be: (1) a reposturing of U.S. military forces in the region; (2) reinvigorating the alliances the United States had in the region and developing new partnerships there as well; (3) reemphasizing U.S. economic statecraft; (4) using international legal norms as instruments of power and control in the region; and (5) high-level political visits to the region to protect American interests in Asia. The Chinese academy and Chinese government came to recognize these as consistent instruments of power the United States was utilizing to ensure its interests were being served in the region and could vigorously compete with expanding Chinese interests.

Recognizing the Rebalance to Asia as a blueprint for American strategic competition with China as it rose economically, politically, and militarily, both the Chinese academy and Chinese government derived corresponding foreign policy responses to the challenges posed by the Rebalance. These included direct initiatives to negotiate China's interests with the United States; the development of coercive military capabilities for the purposes of enhancing China's negotiating position vis-à-vis the United States and the other countries of the

Asia-Pacific; and the use of indirect, soft-power balancing of American institutional power in the region. For the most part, it was probably the case that over the last half decade or so, the Chinese were satisfied with the outcomes of the strategic interaction between China and its superpower competitor.

The arrival of the Trump administration seems to have thrown this calculus completely or mostly off. To Chinese puzzlement, the new U.S. administration appears to have relinquished a few of the instruments of power in its tool kit (e.g., renouncement of TPP and possibly leadership of the international liberal economic order). The Chinese have promptly taken advantage of this development by promoting the Chinese free trade initiative, the RCEP, and have announced China's willingness to take the lead in managing the international economic order. Nonetheless, U.S. willingness to reenergize the military instrument as the central means of exerting American power in the region must spell trouble for Chinese foreign policy specialists and strategists. Similarly, American willingness to prioritize a number of economic issues—currency manipulation, trade disputes in general, bilateral investment treaties, trade deficits—which normally are not front and center in Sino-U.S. relations, must also spell trouble for Chinese policy makers.

If you are a senior U.S. government official perched in the Old Executive Office Building, the E-Ring of the Pentagon, the seventh floor of the Department of State's office, or even in the Oval Office, the thought of Chinese discomfort at the emerging, somewhat disruptive policies of the Trump administration overturning the policy foundations set by the Obama Rebalance to Asia might not be a major concern. In fact, that discomfort might even be cause for satisfaction. Whatever positive effects the Rebalance generated in the region, it also was predictable, and apparently, as this article has demonstrated, its intentions and desired effects were assessed correctly by Chinese analyses. This allowed China to formulate policies that were meant to neutralize or mitigate the effects of the Rebalance. Whether the Chinese policy response succeeded in doing so would be the subject of another study entirely. One way of interpreting the history of Sino-U.S. relations over the past five years is that the Chinese ate our lunch and the Trump administration is going to take corrective measures to reverse that trend. Another way of interpreting the dynamics of the relationship is that the two superpowers achieved a policy and balance of power equilibrium that permitted an orderly management of international relations, both in the Asia-Pacific and globally, at least for the near to midterm. If the Trump administration is assuming the former, then the Chinese are quite correct: we are in for a rocky ride.

Notes

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